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FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
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INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
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SENSITIVE
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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS
DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/PD, AND DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TV LAGS BEHIND RADIO/INTERNET COUNTERPARTS

REF: ASMARA 105
ASMARA 095
ASMARA 212

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The opposition website www.assenna.com and its sister radio station have seen considerable success over the past few months and have continued to expand both audience and programming. Assenna's stories stimulate much discussion around Asmara, but its consumers are not discriminating-dubious report have as much currency as more credible pieces, and could undermine its legitimacy. Opposition television has somewhat fallen into this trap. It functions as a mouthpiece for the Ethiopian-based Eritrean opposition, reducing its credibility. Opposition television is also more difficult to tune into compared to its radio and website counterparts. End Summary.

RADIO ASSENNA IS TALK OF THE TOWN

¶2. (SBU) The website www.assenna.com and its affiliate Radio Assenna (REF A) have perhaps the widest following of all opposition news sources available in Asmara. Its news stories are discussed in a variety of social circles, from professional meetings to drinks among friends. One UN local staff admitted that "most everyone" listens to Radio Assenna at work. The reason the Assenna name brand is so popular is partly because anyone can access it. Not only can the public tune into a shortwave radio station, but listeners can also go to a low-bandwidth website to hear the radio broadcast online. Radio Assenna also does not promote the Eritrean opposition. It delivers the news without the excessive anti-GSE rhetoric that mars other opposition sites.

¶3. (SBU) Radio Assenna recently announced the launch of another opposition radio station, ERENA ("our Eritrea"), to be broadcast from Paris. The radio station has already received praise from Reporters Without Borders, who labeled the station a "historic project." Many former Eri-TV broadcasters have reportedly joined the ERENA line-up, including Biniam Simon. Currently, the opposition website delina.org offers a link to ERENA's broadcasts, providing live streaming of interviews and reports. The latest interview (undated) is between Biniam Solomon and Tes Meharena, founder of the opposition website asmarino.com.

CREDIBILITY IS KEY

¶4. (SBU) Assenna.com delivers many of the important news stories before its competitors. It had early and fairly accurate notice of

the ministerial cabinet shuffle (Ref B) and news of the June diaspora demonstration in DC. It does, however, include stories that sound as if they were picked up from a conspiracy blog. In April, Assenna scanned a supposed image of a \$275 million check written by the Fabon Bank of Hong Kong to President Isaias and his son. In June, the website reported 41 computers were stolen from the Office of the President that contained files on political prisoners and diplomatic "covert dealings." The report also stated "millions of monies" went missing from the Commercial Bank of Eritrea. These events, if they happened at all, may have other explanations, such as the recent CBE payment to Cargill for a wheat purchase (Ref C).

OPPOSITION TV ALMOST NON-EXISTENT

15. (SBU) Despite the success of the Assenna name brand, opposition television has not made noticeable gains since its debut in February last year. The television station Dehai Ertra still broadcasts montages of romanticized landscapes and burning rhetoric from the Eritrea Democratic Alliance (EDA). The fact that Dehai Ertra is based in Ethiopia also erodes its appeal. Moderate Eritreans looking for legitimate news of its government's misdeeds are wary of turning to Ethiopia for information.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Radio and internet continue to prove themselves as powerful tools for the opposition. The key to success is maintaining legitimacy as a news outlet rather than serving as an extension for Eritrean opposition groups.
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